

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****Caring for Special Needs during Disasters:  
What's being done for Vulnerable Populations?**

June 15, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “Caring for Special Needs during Disasters: What’s being done for Vulnerable Populations?”:

“We are here to discuss what is being done to ensure that the needs of all persons are considered before, during and after a disaster. To this end, this Committee has been closely following the development and work of the Disability Coordinator at FEMA.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 required FEMA to appoint a Disability Coordinator and tasked it with coordinating with the National Council on Disability.

I would like to provide a special welcome to Ms. Marcie Roth who has been tasked as the Senior Advisor on Disability Issues for FEMA and leads the new Office of Disability Integration and Coordination. I look forward to working with you to ensure that you are provided the resources needed to carry out your mission.

While a strong disability coordinator is needed at FEMA Headquarters, I also believe each Region should have similar positions. As Administrator Fugate continues to shift greater responsibility to the Regional Offices, he should also look to facilitate better coordination on disability issues across the country. Whether conducted at FEMA Headquarters or in the Regions, emergency management planning must be inclusive of the needs of all people.

Hurricane Katrina showed us that we must ensure that those persons most vulnerable during disasters receive additional attention and resources. As the Chairwoman rightly pointed out, children, the elderly, the poor, and the disabled, among others, must become a part of the planning process.

For many of them and their families, their care is most easily a matter of life and death. Consequently, I am disappointed that FEMA has not yet released its updated Comprehensive Planning Guidance with the anticipated new language on all-needs disaster management.

But, perhaps, today’s witnesses will be able to explain the delay and reassure Members that we are doing all that is needed to care for everyone in the event of a disaster. More importantly, I would like to hear how we are moving beyond plans to actual implementation.

I know that Chairman Young from NCD and Ms. Rothe-Smith from National VOAD, share these same views and I look forward to working with them.”

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